

“Baby, Be Good!”



Good Behavior Begins with Trust

Babies are not born “good” or “bad.” Good (and bad) behavior takes years to learn. In the first few months, your baby is learning how to eat, breathe, and sleep outside the womb. He has very little control over what his body does. He depends on you to meet his needs. As your baby learns he can trust you to do this, he will look to you for love and support.

The most important lesson to teach your baby in the first year is trust. Babies who learn they can trust others to meet their needs, grow into caring, responsible people. The secure bond you create now will make you a great teacher when your baby is old enough to learn how to make good behavior choices.

Crying Is Not Bad Behavior

If your baby is crying, she is telling you she needs something. Respond with curiosity. Try to understand what your baby’s crying means. Is she hungry? Lonely? Tired? Does she have a wet or dirty diaper? Is she uncomfortable? Is there too much going on around her? Is she bored? Every baby is different, so it will take practice to figure out what your baby needs and how to help. Giving her the help she needs as soon as possible will make it less likely she will cry as much as the months go by.

Baby Proofing Is Good Discipline

Babies under 1 year old are too young to understand why they should stop doing something. Your baby needs and wants to explore his world. Younger, less mobile babies “explore” by putting things in their mouths. Older babies move toward things that attract their interest. If you find yourself saying “no” all the time because you fear your baby will break something or hurt himself, take a look at how things are arranged in your home. Put away things that could hurt your baby. Doing this is called baby proofing. Use baby proofing to give your baby safe places to play and explore.

Build Your Discipline (Teaching) Tool Kit

Teaching children to behave has always been a challenge. What works best is to make it easy for her to do the right thing. Parents who are excellent teachers have many different tools they use to guide their baby’s behavior. Here are the best tools for babies under 1 year:

- Notice good behavior. When your baby does things you like, give her smiles, kind words, and hugs.
- Prevent problems before they happen. For example, use a baby gate on the stairs. Put safety latches on low cabinets.
- Ignore behavior that is not harmful to anyone (even if it’s annoying).
- Distract your baby. Get your baby to focus on something else, like a cute toy or a curious sound.
- Redirect your baby. Do this physically by moving your baby away from what you don’t want her to get into. Or use a warm, enthusiastic tone of voice to shift her attention to something else.
- Substitute an acceptable object or activity for an unacceptable one. For example, when you remove your keys from your baby’s hand, replace them with a rattle or some other safe, interesting object.
- Remember to praise your baby for doing something that is okay after you have ignored misbehavior or redirected her.



“No” Is a Powerful Word—Use It With Care

Instead of saying “no” all the time, be a teacher. Use words like “hot,” “tastes bad,” or “stop” to encourage your baby to do something different. Save “no” for the times when you need to protect your baby from getting hurt.

Spanking a Baby Doesn’t Work

We are learning new things about babies’ brains and how they learn. Babies don’t understand what it means to obey you. They don’t learn good behavior from spanking. Spanking is confusing and makes babies cry more. It damages the trust babies need to develop to feel loved and secure.

No baby should be spanked or slapped. Many babies are injured this way. Family members may tell you to spank your baby so he won’t be spoiled and will know you’re the boss. But this isn’t true. Spanking doesn’t teach these things. When your baby does something you don’t like, show him something else he can do instead. Show him a better way.

Make sure your baby gets plenty of your attention when she is doing things right, not just when she is doing things wrong.

Handling Your Baby’s Angry Behavior

Babies don’t have words to tell us why they are upset or angry. Babies’ angry behaviors (like crying) are how babies tell us they don’t have what they want or need right now. So understanding the messages behind angry behavior can help you handle these difficult situations.

- Is she angry because she’s hungry? If so, feed her.
- Is she angry because she’s tired? If so, change the schedule to help her get more rest.
- Is she frustrated because she can’t do something? If so, show her how or help her.
- Is she frustrated because you have set limits on her behavior? If so, try to interest her in a different activity or object. Once your baby is calm, give her a hug and show a little understanding.

Ask yourself where and when your baby shows angry feelings. If you notice it happens a lot in a particular place or situation, think about what you can do to help her stay calmer. If your baby gets upset in a public place, try to interest her in something else, such as a toy or cereal box.

Responding to the messages of your baby’s angry feelings now creates good habits for handling anger later.

Handling Your Angry Feelings

You may feel upset or angry when your baby wakes you up at night, cries a lot, or messes a diaper as soon as you put it on. Your baby doesn’t do these things on purpose to make you angry. Babies are simply not able to think this way. It doesn’t help for you to get angry. Instead, focus on calming yourself. Think of things that help you feel better. Remind yourself that it will not always be this way. If you still feel angry, call a friend and ask what he or she would do to calm down. Ask someone to watch your baby while you get some fresh air.

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